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ABSTRACT

Disadvantaged students have difficulty adapting to conventional school programs because they do not possess the basic academic skills necessary to succeed, have a limited perception of the value of education, lack the motivation to achieve, lack self-confidence, and tend to rely on others for support. Programs that ensure the success of these students can build their self-concept. Techniques used in such programs include developing simple, clear, short-term objectives; praising students for correct answers; expecting students to succeed; using active listening techniques; using simulation activities that encourage class discussion and critical thinking; and using activities that promote the involvement of all students. To counteract negative behaviors of disadvantaged youth, teachers can use rewards and encouragement rather than punishment; use specific rather than general statements; develop rapport with parents through home visits; show practical application of what is taught; provide continuous feedback for socially approved behavior; and accept the student as a person. Other suggestions for teachers are to involve motor activities whenever possible, stress actions rather than tests, use role playing, appeal to a broad array of senses and learning styles, offer tasks for extra credit, avoid grading all students with the same criteria, and give out study sheets for new units. Teachers can increase a student's motivation by showing a personal interest. Successful teachers are flexible, innovative, and creative at making the program student oriented. (The document also includes a list of 37 techniques for working with vocational education students.) (CML)

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TITLE: TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

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TARGET POPULATION: EDUCATORS WORKING WITH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

ABSTRACT: Suggestions are given on teaching techniques and strategies which work with disadvantaged students.

CE 055 382

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TECHNIQUES FOR TEACHING THE DISADVANTAGED STUDENT

Overview

Disadvantaged students have difficulty in adapting to conventional school programs because they do not possess the basic academic skills necessary to succeed. They have developed a limited perception of educational value and lack the motivation to achieve in regular programs. This lack of success contributes to the development of poor attitudes and poor self-images. The academically disadvantaged student especially lacks self-confidence and tends to rely on others for support. This increases dependency on others and decreases individual initiative.

Definitions/Terminology

Special Needs Learner - special needs learners are those students identified as handicapped or disadvantaged.

Disadvantaged Learner - individuals (other than handicapped individuals) who have economic or academic disadvantages and who require special services and assistance in order to enable them to succeed in vocational education programs. Such term includes individuals who are members of economically disadvantaged families, migrants, individuals who have limited English proficiency, and individuals who are dropouts from, or who are identified as potential dropouts from, secondary school (United States, 1984, pg. 53).

Frequently Asked Questions

Q. HOW CAN PROGRAMS BE DESIGNED TO HELP ENSURE SUCCESS FOR STUDENTS?

A. Because of disadvantaged student's poor self-concept, it is important for programs to be designed to enable pupils to achieve success and build self-images. This can be done by developing simple, clear, short-term objectives for particular units that lead to reward for accomplishment of the objectives. Participation in community and group activities can help students gain recognition and positive feedback. If a student is enrolled in vocational education, s/he should be encouraged to join a vocational student organization.

Disadvantaged students may suffer from a strong feeling of failure. Many times they feel insecure and defensive and consequently rarely volunteer in class for fear of responding incorrectly. Ways to overcome this fear include praising the student for correct answers, expecting the student to succeed, and active listening. Let the student give a delayed response if necessary. Do not feed the self-fulfilling prophecy of having

low opinions and expectations of the student, therefore facilitating their performance on a low level. Design simulation activities to encourage class discussion and critical thinking. By the creation of activities for involvement of every student, group unity in the classroom will be increased.

Q. WHAT CAN TEACHERS DO TO COUNTERACT NEGATIVE BEHAVIORS BY DISADVANTAGED YOUTH?

A. Many students demonstrate behaviors and attitudes which are contrary to those expected of them in school. The insecurities of daily living, a history of failure in school, and inner tensions caused by family conflicts may contribute to a hostile or apathetic attitude toward education. They may view school as irrelevant and feel alienated from the educational system. Survival may be their main goal.

To help fight these anti-school attitudes and behaviors the following suggestions may be helpful.

1. Rewards and encouragement are more effective than punishment, scolding, criticism, and discouragement.

2. Examine the number of classroom rules and regulations placed upon the student. Make sure the student knows about all the rules and regulations and the consequences of breaking the rules. Be prepared to filter out those which are irrelevant to learning (e.g., gum chewing, sitting still).

3. Be specific rather than general in your statements.

4. Develop rapport with parents through home visits, etc.

5. Invite and encourage industrial representatives to visit classes to demonstrate skills, or to discuss job opportunities and qualifications.

6. Equip school facilities (labs, shops) as they are equipped in the real world.

7. Show practical application of ideas and theories presented.

8. Provide continuous feedback to the student for socially approved behavior, and academic and skill achievement.

9. Accept the student as a person and always acknowledge the individual's self-worth.

10. Provide positive reinforcement for even small accomplishments.

11. Note behavioral changes in the student. Discuss these with the student and if appropriate refer the student to a counselor for help - not discipline (Altfest, 1975).

Q. WHAT TEACHING TECHNIQUES ARE SUCCESSFUL WITH DISADVANTAGED YOUTH?

A. Basic methods and techniques used in vocational education, with the philosophy of "learning by doing," are well adapted to working with disadvantaged students. Some of those methods are: the teaching of manipulative skills, small group and individualized study, the use of demonstrations and field trips, supervised occupational experience programs, and problem solving techniques. Also, vocational education can be used to motivate students to complete other academic courses (Altfest, 1975).

Disadvantaged students generally feel a need for security which can be met through structure and routine. Being consistent and clear about what is expected of the student and establishing a standard routine will help the student with his/her need for structure and order. Always avoid confrontations with the student in front of the class.

Many disadvantaged youth learn better by doing rather than reading or hearing about something. Awareness of a person's learning style is vital to individual success. There are several teaching techniques that can be useful in helping students to use their learning style.

1. Schedule as much class time as possible on laboratory assignments which are physical in nature.

2. Involve motor activities whenever possible.

3. Stress action rather than tests.

4. Employ role playing to provide a common base for people with different frames of reference or background. It will enable everyone to see the incident and share reactions to it. For example, have students role play a boss and employee, where the boss is reprimanding the employee for being late to work. Have students switch roles, to show different communication styles.

5. Classroom instructional units should be based on student's shop laboratory, job, or home projects.

6. Always scan material to be taught for new words and concepts which need clarification.

7. Through planned role playing, dramatize outcomes or decisions (Altfest, 1975).

Students may have developed a dependency on one sense to learn. Generally, disadvantaged students respond more readily to visual and/or verbal signals rather than written stimuli. Presentations using movies, slides, video tapes, teaching machines, and charts appeal to a broad array of senses. Through a learning style inventory, it can be determined which sensory mode the student learns best, and use teaching techniques particular to that mode.

Great difficulty in taking tests and achieving passing grades is particularly common to some disadvantaged students. Teachers can design numerous ways in which students can receive points for grades. Allow the student to demonstrate his/her strengths and proficiencies in a variety of ways. Pressure of speed and time tend to place undue stress on students. Allow the students to be administered exams without the constraints of speed and time as much as possible. It may also be helpful to let the students stretch, walk around, relax during the testing period. For those students who are poor readers and writers, a tape recorder may be a viable alternative. When checking papers, check those which are correct rather than just the wrong answers. Upgrade, don't downgrade.

Assign a variety of things students can do for extra credit. Instead of a book report, maybe they could make graphs, charts, timetables, or design a book cover. Perhaps they could interview someone and record it on tape. Give them choices and alternative ways of passing the course; hold them responsible for the choices they made.

Avoid grading all students with the same criteria. Consider each one on individual merits. Don't penalize for spelling if they get the answers correct or give credit for the number of correct letters in the word, rather than counting the whole word wrong.

When beginning a new unit, pass out study sheets telling the students the key concepts they should know. Go over the study sheets in class frequently before the test is given. Allow students to orally test one another. Or, give the test several times before the final test. Grade all correct parts with one-half credit rather than giving no credit. Make sure that test directions are repeated each time there is: (a) a new section of the test; (b) a new page; or (c) more than 10 questions. Be sure that questions have "white space" around them so they will stand out on tests. Students with perceptual problems often run questions together. Consider giving several short tests rather than one long test and when possible, make it an open book test. Students may feel less frustrated when easier questions are at the beginning of the test.

Q. WHAT SUGGESTIONS CAN I OFFER TO STUDENTS FOR SELF-HELP SKILLS?

A. Often disadvantaged students experience a lack of structure and organizational skills which tends to complicate their school responsibilities. There are techniques and activities which may assist students in developing organizational skills. One possibility is to provide a calendar at the first of each month - tests, assignments, reading, notebooks, hands-on projects, clean-up, and other duties. A bulletin board calendar can correspond to the students' calendar and reflect any changes, additions, or deletions. Encourage pre-planning to ensure assignments and projects are completed by deadlines.

Teach students how to set up notebooks for each class, or to divide a large notebook into specific sections for designated classes. Reward those who arrive with paper, pencil, book, and/or materials and supplies for the day's activities or projects.

Communicate to students the importance of punctuality. Emphasize the relationship between being on time and success in employment. If possible, the purchase of an industrial time clock might increase awareness of schedules and time management.

An inability to start a task is often the result of feeling overwhelmed and confused as to how to begin. Help students break down assignments and projects into smaller tasks with appropriate timelines. Student-teacher contracts are one approach to help students complete assignments within a specified time period. Contracts allow students to work at their own pace while still functioning in acceptable perimeters.

Some students will improve their organizational skills when environmental distractions are eliminated or reduced. Individual study carrels, ear phones, and isolated seating are some ways to help deal with distractions. A student's learning style, however, must be a consideration when choosing such tactics.

How to study is a dilemma for many students, including disadvantaged. Review with students instructions on study habits and techniques for maximizing their time in studying for tests. Again, time management is a key issue in the development of organized study habits.

Q. WHAT IS A KEY TO SUCCESS WITH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS?

A. As with all students, motivation is the primary ingredient to providing disadvantaged students with positive learning experiences. Determine students' interests and capitalize on these interests when presenting new material or showing assignments relevant to society. Field trips and shadowing experiences may provide students with exposure to activities outside their frame of reference. Many disadvantaged students have no role model to follow in selecting or pursuing a career objective. Increase in motivation can be developed by showing special interest (personal interest) in the student.

Giving students the opportunity to assume responsibility is often an ego builder as well as an opportunity to build on the student's strengths. These students generally learn to assume responsibility at an early age, and consequently have leadership qualities that many times goes untapped.

Research has indicated that traditional program-oriented techniques of teaching are not generally successful with disadvantaged youths. Success comes from flexibility,

innovations, and creativity in making programs of study "person-oriented." These students will be motivated to develop their learning potential if allowed to thrive in a positive learning environment.

Vocational Special Needs - 2nd ed.

Michelle D. Sarkees & John L. Scott

WORKING WITH DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

Some helpful techniques for working with disadvantaged students include the following:

1. Collect and analyze all available information relating to the individual.

2. Help the student establish short-term and long-range goals that are realistic.

3. Focus on learner abilities such as artistic, mechanical, or other natural abilities.

4. Challenge the learner's interests and abilities.

5. Do not label disadvantaged learners as low achievers because of their different learning style(s).

6. Identify the level of the learner and develop an open system of individualized instruction (documented in an individually prescribed program - IVEP).

7. Involve students in the planning process.

8. Make goals clear to learners.

9. Modify teaching techniques to the style and rate of learning of each learner. Use practical experiences and explanations rather than abstract concepts.

10. Use concrete, tangible demonstrations rather than verbal and abstract.

11. Use illustrations, audiovisual aids, field trips, and direct experiences, whenever possible.

12. Keep learners aware of progress at all times and give them reason to believe that they are succeeding.

13. Orderly well-planned procedures should be used to help give learners security and stability. Use progress charts to document achievements.

14. Encourage learner expression whenever possible, such as during teacher-student planning and group activities.

15. Format instructional materials into shorter units of work.

16. Provide for frequent evaluation of learner progress to identify and provide necessary remedial assistance.

17. Avoid covering too much content too quickly.

18. Help to build learner self-concept and self-confidence by constant encouragement and reinforcement. Reinforce these students frequently to increase their motivation. Any feedback or praise that they receive will be helpful in encouraging them to continue or increase their performance level. It will also help to improve their self-concept.

19. Work as closely and as much as possible with other agencies and school resources.

20. Use a simple, direct vocabulary to keep communication channels open.

21. Avoid sarcastic or judgmental comments.

22. Recognize that the learner's vocabulary may be more limited and less precise than the peer group's.

23. Make directions simple, explicit, and precise.

24. Provide written assignment sheets or have learners copy assignments in notebooks to develop organization skills.

25. Use hands-on activities whenever possible.

26. Provide reading materials with appropriate vocabulary levels (e.g., sentence structure and content suited to the student's reading level, interests, and experience). Utilize math and reading resource personnel.

27. Allow the learners to progress at their own pace.

28. Use constructive criticism.

29. Refrain from creating undue pressures.

30. Provide for closure at the end of lessons and units.

31. Present examples of successful workers from various cultural or minority groups to serve as examples and role models for these students. Invite workers in the community from various cultural or minority groups to come to the class and share their experiences with these students. Assign students to interview community leaders and workers from various cultural or minority groups.

32. Identify the reading and math levels for these students. Use this information in selecting or developing instructional materials.

33. Encourage students who are proficient in hands-on skills to become peer tutors for learners. This situation can serve as a motivating activity, as a way for disadvantaged students to increase their academic skills by reviewing related reading and math material, and as a reinforcer for positive peer relationships.

34. Field trip and shadowing experiences provide exposure to people who hold jobs associated with the program. Many of these students have no role model to follow in selecting or pursuing a career objective.

35. Whenever possible, encourage students to assume responsibility. These students generally learn to assume responsibility at an early age. Placing them in a position where they can demonstrate responsibility and leadership ability will allow them to actively participate in program activities rather than having to sit passively in the classroom and listen. Techniques that actively involve these learners are best suited to their needs.

36. Student-teacher contracts are an effective approach to allow students to proceed at their own pace while still assuming the responsibility for completing assignments within a specified time period.

37. Work with support staff to develop and implement appropriate behavior modification techniques for those students who display hostile or defiant behavior. Occupationally accepted behavior should always be stressed in working with them.

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